

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications -- Department of English

English, Department of

April 1998

It's a Question of Faith: Discourses of Fundamentalism and Critical Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom

Amy M. Goodburn

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, agoodburn1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs>



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Goodburn, Amy M., "It's a Question of Faith: Discourses of Fundamentalism and Critical Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom" (1998). *Faculty Publications -- Department of English*. 17.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs/17>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English, Department of at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications -- Department of English by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

It's a Question of Faith: Discourses of Fundamentalism and Critical Pedagogy in the Writing Classroom

AMY GOODBURN

In the past decade, the discourses of critical pedagogy (Giroux, Kincheloe, McLaren, Simon) have shaped the arena of composition studies (Berlin & Vivion, Bizzell, Fox, Hurlbert & Blitz, Knoblauch & Brannon, Shor). As compositionists turn to writing pedagogics that explore how issues of difference shape people's lives, many have begun to examine how social constructs of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on account for the ways that students read and write about texts. While these constructs are clearly important for students to examine in terms of their personal and social identities, there is another difference that usually remains invisible: the role of religious identity. Given the important role that religion plays within U.S. culture (with the majority of U.S. citizens describing themselves as religious in some way), it's surprising that so few critical educators have dealt with the implications for how students' religious identities often conflict with the assumptions upon which critical pedagogy is premised. Although critical educators call for pedagogics that privilege and problematize student experience, the emphasis on issues of race, class and gender oftentimes does not name or account for religion, a construct which intersects and envelops these categories in many students' lives. As scholars such as Ann Berthoff, Beth Daniels, and James Moffett have noted, this lack of discussion about religious identity is certainly ironic given the importance of faith and spirituality in early critical educators' work (such as Paulo Freire). Even worse, when students' religious identities are discussed within the literature of critical pedagogy, it is usually described negatively, oftentimes as an impediment to be overcome (Kincheloe).

I believe this absence of discussion about the role of religious identity with respect to critical writing pedagogics has left teachers who espouse critical principles unprepared to address student resistance rooted in religious belief. One of my most painful experiences as a critical teacher occurred when I found myself constantly in conflict with a student named Luke in an intermediate-level college writing course focused on issues of difference in U.S. culture.¹ In this essay I examine one type of religious identity—that of Christian Fundamentalism—and profile Luke's oral and written responses as a means of illustrating how his reliance on fundamentalist discourse played a key role in producing his resistance to

assigned texts, to the course's stated goals, and to my authority as the teacher. It was only through examining Luke's responses in terms of fundamentalist discourse that I began to understand and appreciate his position in my classroom and, further, was challenged to question some of the assumptions undergirding the discourses of critical pedagogy in which I had placed so much faith. Based on my experiences, I suggest that Luke's responses foreground two problems with the absence of discussion regarding the role of fundamentalist discourse with respect to critical writing pedagogics. First, it has left teachers relatively unprepared for students who resist reading and writing about issues of difference due to fundamentalist beliefs. Teachers who are unaware of the possible influences of fundamentalist beliefs on student writing and reading can often misread their students' responses. Secondly, it has allowed critical educators to overlook a common thread between the discourses of critical pedagogy and fundamentalism: the language of social critique. By ignoring the similar roles of social critique in the discourses of both fundamentalists and critical educators, critical educators often miss opportunities to find areas of common ground with fundamentalist students and leave their own assumptions about the methods and goals of critical pedagogy uninterrogated—in decidedly uncritical ways.

My interest in exploring the connections between discourses of fundamentalism and critical pedagogy came about quite by accident, while I was conducting research for my dissertation at a large state university in three sections of English 300—an intermediate college level writing class focused around issues of difference within U.S. culture.² Initially I sought to examine how students and teachers negotiate authority within writing courses focused on issues of difference. Although I was a teacher who supported critical writing pedagogies, I came to this project believing that students' voices were absent from the literature on critical pedagogy, and I wanted my research to focus on students' descriptions and understandings of their experiences within courses based around critical pedagogical principles. I chose English 300: "The American Experience" because it fulfilled this university's diversity requirement by asking students to read and write about nonfiction texts in terms of race, class, gender, and other social differences. During the term I studied one of my own classes as a teacher researcher and two other English 300 courses as a participant observer, selecting sections taught by teachers who also espoused critical pedagogical goals. In addition, I hired an undergraduate, Mindy, to be a participant observer in my classroom and to interview my students twice throughout the term about their experiences.

At the term's end, I assessed my attempts to be a "critical" teacher as a failure. Even before the term began, I knew that students were oftentimes resistant to taking English 300 because of its diversity focus. Students often describe this class as "politically correct" and say that they need to adopt the politics of the instructor in order to pass. As one student told the participant observer in my class, "One of my friends, when he took this class, he just faked everything that he wrote about. He just lied about everything" (Mindy's Journal I-14-93). Because I had taught this course" several times, I was prepared for students who didn't like to discuss or write about issues connected to racism or sexism or homophobia. But noth-

ing prepared me for the way that students in this particular class responded. As the term progressed, a block of seven students (out of 18) who identified themselves as "Conservative Christians" started to make their resistance visible and vocal: they sat together in a cluster of two tables, they dominated class discussions, and some of them refused to read or write about assigned texts. As a teacher, I was frustrated by my inability to connect with these students, and I was angry with the ways that they treated other students in the class. As a researcher, though, I was intrigued by these students' responses to class discussions and assigned readings, particularly in terms of the grounds of authority upon which they asserted themselves. At semester's end, both Mindy and I discussed the ways that religious difference seemed to play an important part in how the students had responded to the course assignments and to me.³ In attempting to write about this course for my dissertation, then, I began to explore the literature of fundamentalism and to consider more fully why fundamentalist discourse seemed to be more powerful and attractive for many of the students than the discourses of critical pedagogy that I had initially hoped to enact.⁴

My own consciousness regarding the term "fundamentalist" emerged in concert with the 1994 political election and public discourse about the rising influence of the "Religious Right" in American society. Popular news magazines such as *Newsweek* and *Time* and television shows such as *48 Hours* have all profiled, in varying degrees, the rise of "fundamentalism" within U.S. culture. Within academic circles, Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby's Fundamentalist Project—a multi-million dollar, six-year, six-volume study comparing fundamentalisms around the world supported by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences—reflects how scholars have begun to attend to fundamentalist belief as a means of interpreting social and political behavior. While as late as the 1960s most fundamentalists eschewed political action as secondary to the goals of missionary conversion, recently fundamentalist discourse—through the political power of the Christian Coalition and the conservative think tanks with which it is allied—has shaped the U.S. cultural and political scene. And while school curriculum has historically been a site of contest over different religious beliefs and values, increasingly, fundamentalists have named schools as a primary site for political action. Indeed, debates about the role of religious belief in public education have become almost mainstream, with proposed constitutional amendments to legitimize group prayer in the classroom, calls for vouchers to fund student enrollment in private Christian schools, and current lawsuits in states such as Alabama to allow Christian religious activities, such as Bible reading and the posting of the ten commandments, within K–12 public schools (Kaniiner). It's not surprising, then, that students' texts and responses reflect and produce this larger cultural discourse. But given that many of these activities are supported by Christians and others who do not name themselves as fundamentalist, using the term "fundamentalist" as a means of understanding behavior is complicated.

In its historical sense Christian fundamentalism describes "a coalition of conservative, predominantly Calvinist, Protestants that emerged from within a broader, more ecumenical evangelical culture in the late nineteenth century" based on the five fundamentals of faith (Bendroth 4). Based on the 1895 Niagara Bible

Conference, the five fundamentals of faith, which separate heretics from believers, include 1) the virgin birth of Christ, 2) substitutionary atonement (Christ's death as payment for human sin), 3) the bodily resurrection of Christ and the supernatural reality of miracles, 4) inerrant Scripture (without factual or scientific error) and 5) dispensational premillennialism (the literal Second Coming of Christ) (Bendroth 5). But this historical definition is complicated by the fact that the term "Christian fundamentalist" within U.S. culture often conjures images of people with narrow or extreme attitudes. And in its contemporary sense the term "fundamentalist" is used more broadly to include groups of people for whom religious belief constitutes an all-encompassing personal and social identity and who perceive this identity as being threatened by secular social forces. As Marty and Appleby suggest, this notion of perceived threat is essential for understanding fundamentalist responses:

Feeling this identity to be at risk in the contemporary era, they [fundamentalists] fortify it by a selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs, and practices from a sacred past... to serve as a bulwark against the encroachment of outsiders who threaten to draw the believers into a syncretistic, areligious, or irreligious cultural milieu. (3)

In defining Christian fundamentalist discourse within this essay, then, I am not referring to a description of practices or institutional affiliations, but rather to a set of guiding assumptions, what Kathleen Boone describes in *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism* as "a tendency, a habit of mind, rather than a discrete movement or phenomenon... a body of discourse arising from belief in the sole authority of an inerrant Bible" (10) and what Joseph Kincheloe names as "an absolutist view of religious authority, the literal nature of the Bible as an infallible text, and the centrality of a conversion experience on the road to the salvation of the soul" (50). In my class, the seven students who described themselves as "Conservative Christians" belonged to several different churches and denominations, but all defined themselves as holding "true" Christian beliefs that were more authentic than those of other students and felt that they were the only ones who were "saved." Regardless of whether students named their beliefs as fundamentalist or not, their discourses seemed powerfully shaped by these common tendencies or habits of mind. As Bendroth suggests, the discourse of fundamentalism has become increasingly prominent because of "[i]ts powerful language of alienation and its critique of moral laxity in the wider culture" (5). It is this powerful language of critique that I wish to explore further by profiling the writing of Luke, the student who seemed to be the most resistant in my English 300 course.

Luke: A Case Study

A 19-year-old sophomore majoring in English, Luke was a member of the men's gymnastic team and a Christian Fellowship Bible group on campus. Without question, one of the most important issues on Luke's mind was his faith. Describing himself as an Episcopalian Christian in a student survey, Luke's religious commitments surfaced in the class in many ways. During class discussions about readings on multicultural issues, he often pulled a New Testament from his backpack to cite

biblical authorities whom he felt were relevant to the topic at hand. His papers also reflected his interest in writing about and sharing his religious beliefs: for the first assignment, which asked students to trace the history of one of their beliefs, Luke wrote a narrative describing his conversion experience and his subsequent views of life after death. Several of his informal response papers to assigned readings shared his religious beliefs as well, usually in opposition to what he considered the secular and controversial issues in the texts. Almost all of Luke's oral and written responses reflected a fundamentalist discourse that motivated his resistance to class assignments and the overall goals of the course throughout the term.

From the first day, Luke made it clear that he was opposed to reading and writing about issues of diversity. In addition to marking "disagree" to a survey of statements such as "I believe issues of diversity should be addressed in university courses" and "I enjoy classes that deal with issues of diversity," Luke hinted at his religious convictions in writing about his initial attitude to the class: "my attitude toward this class is I hope the material is discussed in an unbiased manner and not assumed to be correct, such as the theory of evolution" (Survey 1-5-93). Using the theory of evolution as an example of how curricular knowledge contradicts his religious beliefs, Luke suggests that being "unbiased" means acknowledging his religious convictions as equally valid in relation to other views. Given that evolution is one of the most contested and highly debated issues of school curriculum for fundamentalists, Luke's comments, in retrospect, are not that surprising. Still, as a teacher, I didn't realize that Luke's comment foreshadowed the struggles over "secular" knowledge and religious belief that were to motivate his resistance throughout the term.

One of the most visible sites of Luke's appeals to religious authority can be seen in his response papers to assigned readings. To illustrate the ways that Luke's responses were shaped by his religious discourse, I present two of his response papers which illustrate his negotiations with the texts and my goals as a teacher in assigning them.

Biblical Authority and Revisionist Reading

Luke's first response paper was written in response to Kristine Beatty's poem "Lot's Wife." This poem offers a revisionist reading of the biblical story of Lot's wife, who turned into a pillar of salt after looking back at the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah.⁵ The narrator of the poem describes the daily duties of Lot's wife—baking bread, raising children, and tending to sick neighbors—as opposed to her husband, who spends his life in contemplation with God (while Lot "struggles with the Lord ... she struggles with the housework"). The narrator suggests that Lot's wife does not "regret the sacrifice" of turning into stone because her definition of sacrifice is dependent on relations with her community rather than with God. Students read this poem in conjunction with two other essays about the limiting nature of gender roles.

This poem seemed especially appropriate for the unit, I thought, because it offers a revisionist reading of how men and women's work has been traditionally valued and it suggests possible consequences in making such judgments. I envisioned students engaging in an intertextual conversation among the two essays

and this poem, critiquing or comparing the “theories” offered about gender roles in the essays with the narrative example in the poem. Prepared for the possibility that some students might not know the biblical story of Lot and therefore have no context for understanding the poem, I gave them a brief plot summary beforehand and referred them to the biblical citation. What I was not prepared for, however, was the hostile reception that the poem received by students who were the most familiar with the story. Luke’s response paper was representative of this group. Presented here in its entirety, Luke’s paper focuses solely on the poem, separate from the other two assigned essays:

Response to “Lot’s Wife”

“On the breast of the hill, she chooses to be human, and turns, in farewell—and never regrets the sacrifice.”

This poem by Kristine Batey (sic) is really kind of naive when considered by an Old Testament stand point. How can she say that Lot’s wife “never regets (sic) the sacrifice”? The woman was turned into a pillar of salt. All through the poem, the author makes it sound like God is some aloof character that can pronounce judgement (sic) on someone at any time. God, in the Old Testament, was a friend to Lot’s family and to any one who called on his name. It was God who sent the two angels to warn Lot and his family about the impending judgement on Sodom and Gomorrah. It was not some aloof God that remained quiet while his disciple was killed.

The poem takes an event that happened thousands of years ago and tries to give it twentieth century logic and understanding. Back in this time, there was no place for a wife to question her husband or to disobey him in any way. This poem takes a standpoint that is very sympathetic to Lot’s wife. The fact still remains that she was warned not to look back after fleeing the judgement of God. She looked back and paid the consequence for her action. I personally do not believe that she looked back out of curiosity to see the judgement of Sodom and Gomorrah. She did not obey the command of God given by the angels and paid the cost. This poem is trying to look at the event through the eyes of a twentieth century woman not a woman who lived thousands of years ago.

Furthermore Lot’s wife had been living with him for years and was familiar with the workings of God. She may have done all the things the poem describes, she may have said all the good byes, but they are trivial things when compared to the plans of God. In the closing lines of the poem, the author makes Lot’s wife’s actions out to be “good.” Obviously they were not good because they went against what God had told them to do which was not look back. You can not justify looking back and therefore breaking God’s command by nostalgia.

Clearly this poem triggered a powerful response in Luke. While I had envisioned students would critique the poem, I thought they would do so on the basis of the other two essays and the discussions we had throughout the term. But Luke’s reading makes no mention of other texts or discussions about socially-constructed gender roles. Instead, Luke relies on his own authority as a Biblical scholar to read—and resist reading—the poem in ways that I had not envisioned.

Upon first reading Luke’s response, I immediately was struck by the way he differentiates between the past and the present. As Marty and Appleby note, one of the tenets of fundamentalist discourse is a reaching back to the past, either real or imagined, of original conditions and selecting or retrieving fundamental truths from that past in order to thwart the changing present (3). One of Luke’s main criticisms is that the story of Lot’s wife is being read “through the eyes of a twen-

tieth century woman not a woman who lived thousands of years ago.” This emphasis on distinguishing between past/present is also reflected in the phrases “Old Testament stand point,” “twentieth century logic and understanding,” and “Back in this time.” Arguing that the tale can only be understood within the context it was written, Luke calls any other reading naive.

Luke’s resistance to a revisionist reading of this biblical story is understandable given how he views the authority of biblical text as the literal and unmediated word of God, an authority of meaning that must remain stable and unified across time to ensure that all readers can access the same moral creeds. Rather than retrieving this moral from the story of Lot, Luke argues, the poem (and, by implication, the narrator) “takes a standpoint that is very sympathetic to Lot’s wife.” It is this standpoint—a situated reading from a “modern” perspective—that Luke cannot accept. Using phrases that reflect Luke’s attempt to convey an “objective” perspective—“the fact still remains” and “Obviously”—Luke suggests that those who “impose” twentieth century logic are naive. His statement “You can not justify looking back and therefore breaking God’s command by nostalgia” refers not only to this specific poem but also to Luke’s overall philosophy of how biblical texts can be read. Reading texts through a revisionist lens is dangerous, Luke suggests, because such readings are used to “justify” actions that conflict with God’s will. If the Bible’s textual authority is destabilized, God’s authority is equally open to interpretation—and revision.

Given Luke’s perspective on the authority of meaning within biblical text, it’s not surprising that he does not mention the other two articles that were assigned on this day. What I first attributed to possible laziness on his part (perhaps he hadn’t read them or just didn’t feel like taking the time to write about them) could also be attributed to the fact that, for him, the Bible is the sole source of authority for interpreting *all* other texts. Incorporating ideas from the articles to interpret the poem would have led him to the same downfall as the narrator of the poem, a twentieth century “stand point” that might have justified readings contradictory to God’s intentions. Luke might have used biblical authority to critique the “secular” essays, but he chose instead to focus on the objectionable reading that the narrator offers. Although Luke obviously does take an interpretive stance to the poem, he views himself as correcting and informing the narrator’s naive and nostalgic perspective rather than adopting an interpretive position himself. As Boone suggests, fundamentalists do not view texts as offering multiple readings—there are correct or incorrect readings of a text and those with moral authority have the ability to discern which reading is true (20).

Luke’s resistance to the author’s revisionist reading might be subtly directed to me as well. As Kincheloe notes, students with fundamentalist assumptions often view teachers as the enemy, secular humanists who attempt to destroy faith by undermining religious authority. Kincheloe says that ministers and parents often warn students to remain ever vigilant in fending off such attacks to their religious values (50). Luke’s concluding statement, “You can not justify looking back,” could be interpreted as a reminder to himself or as a warning to me—the one who has selected the poem to begin with—that he will not succumb to what he views

as the heretical reading of a biblical text. The relationship between teacher and text is especially critical for students with fundamentalist beliefs because typically it is an authority figure—a parent or minister—who transmits the inviolable and unmediated word of God from the Bible. Texts other than the Bible are also chosen on the basis of the moral messages that they convey. For a teacher to ask a student with such fundamentalist beliefs to read a text which contradicts such authority is especially problematic.

Luke's fundamentalist beliefs also shape the ways he examines gender issues. While I initially chose "Lot's Wife" as illustrative of some of the gender issues discussed in the other two readings, for Luke gender is a construct that is subsumed or even erased under the larger rubric of religious salvation. For instance, Luke refers to the wife's daily practices as "trivial things compared to the plans of God." Because Luke assumes that the most significant relationship in a woman's life is her individual relationship to God, followed by her relationship to her husband (whom she must obey), he is unable to conceive of the gendered distribution and valuing of work as a significant issue. Indeed, the only place where Luke even raises the issue of gender is in his statement "there was no place for a wife to question or to disobey him in any way." The hierarchy of God, man, and then wife affords no value to valorizing "women's work" in relation to individual salvation. Luke's discourse gives precedence to religious identity over gender.

Fundamentalist discourse also values individual salvation over community affiliation. Given that Luke views individual salvation as every person's main priority, it is not hard to see why he would be unwilling to consider the wife's response to the pagan community in positive terms. David Bleich suggests that the ideologies of individualism and religious values often work to promote sexism (or at least veil the ideologies which support it) because salvation requires individual acts in relation to God, not others. As Bleich notes:

In religious thinking, the individual soul is an ultimate unit that makes the doctrine of salvation possible. There are only two social categories in religious thought—the single person and the total human race. Salvation depends on an individual act—of confession, of contrition, of declaration of faith., for example. (168)

Luke's reading of the wife's actions can only be considered negative because, in his eyes, she privileges human connection over God's will. While one could argue that the wife's actions of caring for her community embodies God's will to love others, Luke reads her actions through the biblical authority he has been taught, an authority which condemns the wife. All issues of difference, like gender, are temporal and thus secondary to eternal salvation. Thus Luke resists reading the wife's actions as shaped by gender because he feels that she had an equal opportunity, via her relationship to Lot, to be "familiar with the workings of God." Grounded in notions of biblical authority, hierarchical relations, and individual salvation, Luke's discourse conflicted with the ways that I had imagined and expected him to respond to "Lot's Wife." The complex web of authority relations in which Luke's reading was positioned overrode my rather simplistic assumption that students would read class texts primarily from theoretical definitions culled from the other two texts.

Christian Salvation and Cultural Assimilation

Because the subject of "Lot's Wife" is religion, it is easy to see how Luke's religious discourse shapes his reading. But his fundamentalist beliefs influenced not only his reading of this poem but all of his responses, even on topics that might seem wholly divorced from religion. The second response paper by Luke seems quite different from that of "Lot's Wife" and, at first reading, does not appear to be influenced by fundamentalist discourse at all. Yet examining the language and assumptions undergirding Luke's text illuminates how for Luke, all life issues are interpreted through a fundamentalist lens.

In this response paper, Luke wrote about the poem "Para Teresa," which presents themes of assimilation, schooling, and identity. Written in English and Spanish throughout (with translations in accompanying footnotes), the poem describes the Chicana narrator's relationship to another Chicana classmate, Teresa, who refuses to adopt the norms of the white culture's schools. The narrator, on the other hand, chooses to assimilate and adopt the value system of the schools. At the end of the poem, the narrator says she understands and respects the rebellious path Teresa has chosen and calls her "my sister."

Upon first reading Luke's response paper, I thought that he had misread the poem because he describes Teresa's choice as "accepting the culture of the white people." But as I read it again and again, I began to see how Luke's fundamentalist assumptions influenced how he read this poem. Indeed, the way he responds to this poem is similar to his response to "Lot's Wife":

Response to "Para Teresa"

The poem by Ines Hernandez is a very good portrayal of the lives of two young minority children whose views of life and how to succeed in a prejudice (sic) world were so different yet had the same goal in mind. The poem is a story about two girls with two opposing views about growing up. One girl [Teresa] decided to take the approach of accepting the culture of the white people. She dyed her hair, put on make-up etc. to make herself more like her white friends. This she hoped would gain her the respect and the security of being a white person.

The other girl, the author of the poem, took the perspective of a more passive resistance. A more subtle refusal to change her own ways. She opposed the prejudice and unfairness right under the noses of the very people who were responsible for it. This attitude, along with doing well in school, added together to make the first girl look silly, an accentuation of her foolish attempt at denying the fate that was inevitable. But what appeared as acceptance of defeat on the part of the second girl, was really the best way to achieve victory for herself and her people.

It was almost as if she was playing the game of the teachers and people in power. She was playing their game so that she might beat them at it one day. That was her ultimate goal. Right now her goal was to please her family and herself. She was not interested in being loud and arrogant as was the first girl. She didn't quite understand the attitude of the first girl but their aims were the same.

The second girl was the smarter of the two. I say this because she took the path that seemed impossible to the second girl and yet she was succeeding. The author wanted to use her life as an example of what hard work and determination can do. She knew that if she could do it then all of her people could do it. Her choice to take the tougher path and more subtle path of resistance made her success even greater. As with all heroes they seem to fall under criticism for the choices they make. But, for reasons just discussed, the choices they make are exactly the things that make them heroes.

I first read Luke's paper as indicative of his failure to critically read and understand the poem. His statement that "the first girl" (Teresa) chose to wear makeup as a means of fitting in with white culture represents what I considered such a misreading. Because I selected this poem as representative of the conflicts people face in assimilating versus maintaining cultural ways of knowing—with the narrator reflecting upon the loss she feels and respecting Teresa's decision *not* to assimilate—Luke's reading seemed, to me, especially problematic. By focusing on the positive narrative of the American dream—a minority's success within a "prejudice (sic) world" is viewed as "an example of what hard work and determination can do" for the individual and "her people"—Luke's response ignores places in the poem that complicate his reading, such as the conclusion in which the narrator calls Teresa "sister" and the fact that the poem is written in both English and Spanish. In rereading Luke's paper in light of his first response paper and the other texts he wrote, however, I realized the extent to which Luke's response to "Para Teresa" was similarly shaped/produced through his fundamentalist interpretive frame. Indeed, one can read Luke's paper as a commentary on his role in this particular class, in which he feels he must passively (and actively) resist as a religious believer to course goals.

Primary to Luke's reading is the notion of how the narrator's "passive resistance" enables her to succeed in ways that Teresa does not. Because the narrator refuses to "change her own ways," Luke argues, she takes a "more subtle path of resistance" that makes her successful. In comparison, Luke reads Teresa's actions of dyeing her hair and wearing makeup as actively "accepting the culture of the white people," actions which he negatively characterizes as "denying the fate that was inevitable." The dichotomy that Luke sets up between Teresa and the narrator, both of whom have "the same goal in mind" reads like a morality play. Teresa is the loud and arrogant girl who adopts superficial appearances to gain "the security of being a white person" while the narrator rejects the easy way out and relies on her own initiative. Even though others view the narrator as having accepted defeat, Luke suggests that she is merely biding her time as "the best way to achieve victory." Luke never says what Teresa's inevitable fate entails, but it's clear that she does not succeed as the narrator does.

Ultimately this passive resistance makes the narrator a hero, an example of what "all of her people could do." The relationship between passive resistance and achieving heroine status is especially intriguing given Luke's statement, "As with all heroes they seem to fall under criticism for the choices they make." Luke does not say who is criticizing the narrator's choices or what these criticisms entail, nor does he say who considers her actions heroic. Her family? White culture? Her people? But Luke's seemingly vague reading makes perfect sense in light of his fundamentalist discourse. Within a fundamentalist framework, those who resist the easy path-materialist and secular influences—are ultimately rewarded through salvation. Those who take the tougher path and refuse to change their beliefs become Christian heroes who, while unappreciated by the secular world, are rewarded with eternal redemption. Thus, the narrator's choice to take "the path that seemed impossible" is rewarded in the end and her life becomes an inspiration for others to follow. For Luke, value resides in individual salvation, not community identification.

The issue of cultural identity versus assimilation, which I read as a major theme throughout the poem, is not relevant to Luke because the narrator's identification with the Chicano community is only important in that she can provide a model to follow for "her people." Like his reading of "Lot's Wife," Luke's response to "Para Teresa" emphasizes the ways that an individual achieves—or fails to achieve—salvation by rejecting community norms for the perceived greater good—in this case "the respect and the security of being a white person."⁶

The relationship between Luke's fundamentalist beliefs and his response to "Para Teresa" can also be seen in the ways that Luke ignores the conclusion of the poem. Having set up a binary between the narrator as role model and Teresa as a pretender, he could hardly acknowledge that the narrator values the choices that Teresa has made in her life. Validating Teresa's use of superficial means to become accepted would be tantamount to moral relativism. To accept Teresa's actions as legitimate would subvert the legitimacy of the narrator's efforts. Like his faith, in which every individual either accepts or rejects salvation, Luke reads the actions of the narrator and Teresa as either heroic or doomed to an inevitable fate—there are no gray areas.

Luke's response can also again be read as a commentary on his position as a religious believer within a secular institution. Luke clearly identifies with the narrator, who wins the game "under the noses" of those in power but still remains true to her beliefs. From the first day with his theory of evolution comment, Luke showed that he viewed the curriculum as a site of struggle between university teachings and religious belief. But rather than viewing this struggle in terms of various social groups vying for legitimation through representation (as I did), Luke views it as a struggle between religious groups and secular ones over the nature of knowledge and belief. As a believer, Luke constantly negotiates knowledge that is "neutral" versus that which is "biased." Like the narrator in "Para Teresa," Luke views himself as taking a subtle path of resistance for which he will eventually be rewarded. This belief, which he describes in his first paper as an "unshakable security and confidence that I am heading for something better... the doorway to eternal life," is reflected in virtually all of his responses to assigned texts.

Beyond Luke's response papers, his fundamentalist assumptions were also visible within his oral responses to his group members, Tyler and Margaret, and me concerning the final course project: a collaborative text on "a single issue or conflict that directly impacts contemporary American life and culture." In addition to compiling an annotated bibliography of at least thirty sources of varying perspectives and positions, students also used "lived experiences" such as interviews, observations, and surveys to gain additional insights into the topic. In their projects, students were encouraged to "present 'multiple truths' instead of just one way of seeing" by foregrounding differences in perspectives about the topic. In keeping with the goals of critical pedagogy, I wanted students to select topics for "real" audiences so that their work could have some visible impact beyond the classroom. In the previous term, for example, one group produced a video on homelessness that was used for residence hall programming while another had written an editorial for the campus newspaper on student attitudes toward date rape. But while the previous class's evaluations of these projects were

overwhelmingly positive, Luke had difficulties throughout the term with respect to the goals and assumptions underlying this assignment.

Luke's group initially had difficulty agreeing on a topic. Although Tyler shared Luke's religious beliefs (and was a member of his Bible fellowship group), Margaret did not, and the three disagreed over every topic they discussed. Every topic Luke and Tyler proposed (usually ignoring Margaret until after they had decided) involved notions of universal morals, which they felt quite comfortable generalizing to everyone. For instance, Luke and Tyler first wanted to write about family values, positing that the loss of family values was responsible for declining morals within the United States. Margaret was hesitant but willing to go along with them. When I asked them how they would go about defining terms like "family," "values," and "morals," Luke got defensive, saying "You're always asking us to define what we mean, always asking questions" (Field notes 2-16-93). On the following class day, I met with Luke's collaborative group again to see if they had decided on a topic. They had changed it from family values to euthanasia. When I asked what research question they were interested in pursuing about euthanasia, Luke said "the ethics of it" (Journal 2-19-93). When I asked the types of euthanasia to which he was referring, Luke said "all of it." Concerned that the topic was too broad, I suggested that the ethics of euthanasia couldn't be divorced from the contexts in which it occurs and that they might find it useful to focus on a narrower topic such as living wills. Luke replied that all euthanasia is unethical because only God has the power to take away life. At this point I realized that once again Luke and I were not simply disagreeing over the type of topic he and his group members might use; we were clashing over assumptions of authority and value. For Luke, values and knowledge are stable, unitary, universal, and revealed by God. For me, values and knowledge are always changing, multiple, partial, and contingent upon various communities in specific historical contexts. While I believe that the topic of ethics cannot be divorced from specific types of euthanasia (and, even more narrowly, each individual context), Luke believes in universal codes of ethics which can be applied in every case. What I considered a pragmatic issue of choosing a smaller topic was representative of a larger issue over whose assumptions about the nature of ethics would be valued.

Equally problematic for Luke and me were our different conceptions of the purpose of this collaborative project. While I wanted students to explore a topic by highlighting multiple perspectives and examining different ways the issue has been contextualized for different purposes, Luke found it difficult, if not impossible, to embrace such goals. For Luke, there are clear cut positions that one can take on every issue and thus a research paper is an exercise in persuasion—in this particular case to prove that all euthanasia is wrong. Because Luke understands euthanasia within the context of strict moral codes concerning life and death, he couldn't conceive of writing from any position except that which denounces it. To present multiple perspectives is to acknowledge and legitimize their validity, a move that he was unwilling to make based on his beliefs about the nature and authority of knowledge.

To say that I found Luke's texts challenging to respond to would be an understatement. While theoretically I view texts as sites for multiple readings, open for

contest and interrogation, Luke's responses set into sharp relief my investment in having the texts read in the ways that I desired, and I felt especially vulnerable in responding to his texts. I didn't want to be accused of being politically biased in the ways that most of the students, including Luke, felt teachers of this course were. At the same time, like Jody Swilky, I believe that teachers' responses should invite students "to analyze conflicting ideologies, so they might begin to attain critical understanding of why they hold certain commitments and why they resist alternative ways of thinking" ("Resisting Difference" 28). Thus, I wanted Luke to complicate the ways that he was reading these texts or at least recognize that his readings are partial and situated through the lens of his fundamentalist assumptions. In responding to his texts, then, most of my comments tended to be in the form of questions, asking for more explication or explanation of his responses. For instance, when Luke wrote that the writer of "Lot's Wife" was taking a twentieth-century approach to a biblical story, I wrote, "Yes, I think you're right. Why do you think this writer took this approach?" In response to Luke's paper on "Para Teresa" that Teresa's actions were an attempt to deny "the fate that was inevitable," I wrote "What fate are you describing as inevitable?" Next to his statement that the aims of the two girls were the same, I wrote "How would you describe these aims?" and in my end comments I asked, "What do you think about the conclusion when she says I respect you and I call you my sister? How does she view her success in relation to the other girl?" I thought these questions might prove helpful to Luke as he revised *his* papers for his portfolio. I was wrong.

Luke included his papers to both "Para Teresa" and "Lot's Wife" in his portfolio but his only revisions were in spelling and comma usage. Surprised that Luke hadn't revised, especially when he had said in class that he wanted an "A" in the course, I attributed his lack of revision to the other priorities in his life. As a gymnast, he had a hectic tournament schedule, and he was also working on the collaborative paper due at the end of the term. However, Luke's interview with Mindy offers perhaps another reason why he did not revise any of his response papers. In assessing the ways that I responded to his texts, Luke says that my margin comments are biased because they reflect my own positions:

She's supposed to be this unbiased grader. You present your viewpoints and the grade, not grade for the content of ideas, but for grammar and punctuation and development of ideas. That kind of thing. And, you know, I don't think she did that. She did that but she tended to give you hints and stuff in the margins that got you thinking—more along what she wanted to hear. (3-16-93).

Luke's view that texts should be evaluated solely on grammar and punctuation and not on the content of ideas is, of course, commonly shared. The dichotomy between form and content is well-established in current traditional approaches to writing, and it is certainly a view with which most of my students agreed. Even though we discussed the relationship between form and content in the texts that we read throughout the term, Luke's prior assumptions that student texts should be read and evaluated solely in terms of superficial features remained strong. But Luke's comments suggest another possible reason why he chose not to revise his response papers. Luke's notion that my comments gave "hints" about what I "wanted

to hear” led him, perhaps, to resist revising except for grammar and punctuation because other revisions would have meant changing his positions to be more like mine. By not revising, Luke avoided the possibility that my beliefs—which he considered radically opposed to his—would influence his texts. While I assumed that Luke could elaborate on his positions *in* response to my comments, he saw little negotiation between revision and appropriation. And, in a sense, he was correct. Although I thought I was careful not to foreground my reading of the text, my questions clearly promoted alternative ways of reading that he did not value. If anything, my response to Luke’s texts probably reinforced his feeling that my comments were a form of trickery, designed to elicit what I wanted him to think and representative of those in power who try to subvert his religious beliefs. What at the time I considered a practical strategy for responding to Luke’s texts so that he couldn’t criticize me (as being politically correct or biased) in retrospect represents a missed “teachable moment.” Instead of engaging in a critical dialogue with Luke about his readings of texts, my comments reinforced his view that I was an impositional authority and, most importantly, eliminated the opportunity for Luke and me to consider possible sources of conflict between our readings. Evaluation, then, further complicated the ways that Luke and I could negotiate our competing assumptions about texts, authority, and knowledge.

Due to the nature of Luke’s oral and written responses throughout the term, I was not surprised to find Luke as hostile to the course at the end of the term as he was in the beginning. Basically, Luke maintained the position he adopted from the start: English 300, which aims to examine and value issues of difference within the United States, runs counter to his religious beliefs. Because fundamentalist discourse is the primary interpretive lens through which he reads the world, any issue that does not acknowledge or contradicts biblical authority is incorrect:

To me, *it all has religious aspects to it*. If you want to get into it, I’ll get into it with you but we’d be here way after two o’clock. You know. That’s where I’m coming from and until everybody believes, you know, this may sound conceited but until everybody believes generally the same thing I believe, you know?... the stuff I’ve made my mind up on, you know, that’s what I believe and I believe it’s the correct view. (Taped Interview 3-16-93, emphasis added)

Given Luke’s assumption that biblical authority provides him with correct views, he is resistant to any course which aims to value difference. Despite the assumptions of critical educators that critical thinking cannot be separated from issues of difference because all knowledge is situated within a world view, Luke makes clear distinctions between “biased” knowledge and thinking because the valuing of multiple perspectives is equivalent, in his eyes, to moral relativism. For Luke, valuing difference in perspectives leads to tolerating those whose lifestyles he finds irreconcilable with his religious beliefs. To tolerate difference undermines his faith that an individual must be saved in order to be accepted:

This class this university is making us take, it wasn’t teaching us how to critically think. It was teaching us to think about diversity. It was telling us that everyone’s the same and all this stuff. I will make up my own mind as what to think and I don’t need the university telling me that I should tolerate everybody... *because not everybody’s tolerable!* (Taped Interview 3-16-93, emphasis added)

Luke’s rejoinder that “not everybody’s tolerable,” is strongly rooted in his religious identity, one that works to categorize people into believers and nonbelievers, saved and condemned. For Luke, any difference—in race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and so on—is a construct to be transcended for religious salvation. Of course, the term “tolerance” itself suggests an unexamined position of privilege from which those in power can choose whom (and whom not) to respect. But Luke’s responses set into relief my own assumptions about what constitutes “tolerable” behavior in the classroom. And while I did not share the grounds upon which Luke’s responses were based, his responses did encourage me to examine the ways that my reliance on critical pedagogical discourses obscured, in some ways, the limits of my own tolerance for difference.

Intersections: Discourses of Fundamentalism and Critical Pedagogy

Those who do not embrace the fundamentalist message have often failed to appreciate the binding power of that message over the hearts and minds of Bible believers. In criticizing the message, one cannot fail to comprehend and respect the situation of the messengers—who, like all interpreters, make their assertions because their text tells them so. (Boone 111)

Luke’s experiences in this class raise significant questions for critical educators to consider as they and their students investigate how “difference” shapes people’s lives. Is it possible to enact a critical pedagogy in a classroom where students do not view knowledge as partial and situated? When students’ main sources of authority are fundamentalist in nature, how can critical teachers legitimize such beliefs in relation to their pedagogical goals? And what should be the limits of a teacher’s “tolerance” for student resistance to course activities and assigned texts?

As a teacher who supports the goals of critical pedagogy, I am troubled and unsettled by students who view such pedagogics as challenges to (and even destructive of) their religious identities. In the same vein, I am troubled by teachers who too easily dismiss their students’ concerns as naive, uncritical, or resistant. For instance, in talking with colleagues about how I could have engaged more productively with Luke, some suggested that students with fundamentalist beliefs should go to fundamentalist schools if they do not wish to be influenced by secular values. Others said that I was given an opportunity to “enlighten” him. And one said that when faced with a similar student, she simply ignored him. I believe these responses are connected to how issues of faith are neglected within critical pedagogical discourses in general. The absence of discussion about student’s religious backgrounds in connection with constructs of gender, race, class, and so on creates a discourse that erases or “others” students in polarizing and reductive ways. It’s true that Luke’s responses in this classroom were extreme, even in the eyes of the other “Conservative Christians” in the class. But to say that Luke doesn’t belong in a public university because of his religious views seems reductive, and the notion that he needs to be “enlightened” by me equally smacks of arrogance and short sightedness. As Stephen Bates concludes in *Battleground*, which profiles a court battle between fundamentalists and educators in Tennessee over a public school reading series, the presence of fundamentalist students in the classroom

is central to promoting the goals of critical educators:

If we truly believe that pluralistic public education is an essential foundation of a peaceful multicultural society, then we should do what we can to keep fundamentalists (and other religious dissidents) in the public schools. Even skipping the occasional book or class, they benefit from and contribute to the democratic mission of public education... By their presence, fundamentalists also give other students an object lesson in diversity. We shouldn't panic when the differentness manifests itself ... Embracing diversity but forbidding its public expression is a crabbed form of pluralism (316).

I initially became interested in studying Luke's responses as a researcher because I was frustrated by what I considered my inability to engage him in the goals of the class. By the end of the term, I viewed Luke's responses as "other" to my own, as radically different from that which I expected or hoped to see in terms of my goals as a critical teacher. Yet, in learning more about the nature of fundamentalist beliefs and attitudes, I began to see more connections than differences between the discourses of fundamentalism and critical pedagogy. As Bates suggests, Luke's presence was an object lesson in diversity for me as a teacher. While at the time I thought that Luke was one of the most resistant to class goals, I now think that he was perhaps one of the most engaged in terms of participating in social critique and in developing a critical consciousness about his identity position in relation to the class texts, other class members, and me. Through Luke's responses, I began to appreciate commonalities between fundamentalist and critical pedagogical discourses: their oppositional stance to the status quo and their critique of mass culture; their assumption that school curriculum is a site of struggle over values and representation—their questioning of the nature of authority (with fundamentalists questioning secular authorities in relation to scripture and critical educators questioning dominant social discourses); their examination of sources of knowledge and belief, and most notably, their desire to convert the "other," to persuade those whom they define as either "unsaved" or "uncritical."

In a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article, "The Warring Visions of the Religious Right," Harvey Cox suggests that liberal and conservative theologians are unable to discuss differences because liberal Christian theologians do not know how to engage conservative theologians (in this particular case at Regent, a graduate university founded by Pat Robertson) within the same theological discourse:

The problem is that many politically liberal Christian theologians have become so enchanted by deconstruction, postmodernism, and secular political philosophies that they find it hard to engage people like the Regent faculty at the theological level in which the argument has to proceed. (69)

Similarly, I suggest that critical educators are unable to engage in productive dialogue with fundamentalist students because they do not see places where connections between the two discourses can be productively bridged. At present, critical pedagogical discourses oversimplify the nature of conservatives' attitudes toward critical practices, particularly when they are based on religious difference. For ex-

ample, Kincheloe argues that conservative and critical educators cannot engage in productive dialogue about the politics of education because conservatives do not appreciate the assumptions upon which critical educators make their arguments. He says that conservative educators,

have trouble understanding that [our] reading and our thinking about reading (whether we are reading and thinking about the traditional canon or about student and teacher lives) are sociopolitical acts—our interpretations cannot be separated from where we are standing when we read and think, in other words, our location in the web of reality. (53)

While Kincheloe ultimately aims to be sensitive to fundamentalist students, his above comment succumbs to the same type of misreading that Cox suggests prevents liberal theologians from engaging with conservative theologians. In essence, Kincheloe doesn't fully appreciate the theoretical or theological level upon which debates about critical pedagogy might be productively engaged. Conservative educators (and conservative students as well) *do* understand that reading and writing are sociopolitical acts. They know that interpretations cannot be separated from their web of reality. But because they do not view their webs in terms of the social matrices that Kincheloe identifies as central, their interpretations are considered naive and uncritical.

Fundamentalist students recognize the sociopolitical nature of reading and school curriculum in general; what they *choose* not to recognize is the importance of theorizing these acts in terms of social differences such as race, class, gender, and so on. Instead, they believe that their web of reality—one that theorizes in terms of secular and religious-based differences—is the most useful in understanding and critiquing educational practices. In many ways, the responses of students with fundamentalist beliefs serve as a mirror (albeit some critical educators might suggest a dark one) that reflects the principles of critical pedagogy from a different location.

Rereading the discourses of critical pedagogy through the mirror of fundamentalist discourse helps to point out uninterrogated assumptions that limit teachers' understanding of their students' responses. For instance, Phyllis Mentzell Ryder suggests that critical educators "need to offer students a persuasive method that exposes the differences between the professed, dominant values and the actual effects of those ideologies" (519). In describing the view of knowledge underpinning critical pedagogy as inherently political, Ryder calls for a developmental approach that provides "spaces for students to hold disparate ideas until time and experience give them ways to reconceptualize those ideas" (523). In a similar vein, Patricia Bizzell argues that one problem with critical pedagogy is that teachers rely upon antifoundationalist notions of authority which posit no authority existing beyond one's historical position: "We exercise authority over them in asking them to give up these foundational beliefs but we give them nothing to put in the place of these foundational beliefs because we deny the validity of all authority, including, presumably, our own" (Bizzell 670). Instead, Bizzell suggests, teachers must use their own ability as rhetors to persuade students to construct a progressive authority that constructs and values knowledge:

We must help our students, and our fellow citizens, to engage in a rhetorical process that can collectively generate trustworthy knowledge and beliefs conducive to the common good—knowledge and beliefs to displace the repressive ideologies an unjust social order would inscribe in the skeptical void. (Bizzell 671)

I agree with Bizzell and Ryder that teachers should not enact a questioning pedagogy merely to question, without positing forms of belief to which students could ascribe. But what about those students who already assume that their sources of authority serve a common good? The students in my classroom who rejected anti-foundationalist claims based on religious authority did not do so out of fear of falling into some sort of skeptical void. They believe in a common good—an eternal and transcendent one—that others can collectively achieve through salvation. And they are more than satisfied in a biblical authority, one in which their knowledge and belief is securely grounded. And to say that time and experience will give students ways to reconceptualize their ideas also seems a bit arrogant, especially when some fundamentalist students' experiences often are that of constantly defending their beliefs from dominant discourse, even those that invoke liberatory goals.

In describing how postmodernism changes one's view of knowledge, Patricia Lather says, "[A] politicized postmodernism shifts the debate to a questioning of what it means to know and be known, how and why discourse works to legitimize and contest power, and the limitations of totalizing systems and fixed boundaries" (88). Similarly, I suggest that a critical pedagogy challenges teachers to ask "How is my discourse operating within the classroom to legitimize and contest knowledge, fixing boundaries that students and I need to negotiate in an ongoing process of reflection and self-critique?"

In reflecting upon how I might have engaged more productively with Luke and the other students who "resisted" the ways I asked them to read texts and view knowledge, I have considered several strategies that might have proved useful. Rather than asking him to problematize the nature of religious authority, perhaps I could have invited Luke to think more about how his religious beliefs shape his reading by acknowledging the ways that I saw his religious discourse shape his texts. For instance, instead of asking Luke to consider the goals of the writer's revisionist approach in "Lot's Wife," I might have noted the ways that Luke seemed angry with the writer and asked him to consider more extensively the stakes involved in interpreting this biblical story differently. Or perhaps, following Richard Miller's suggestions in his essay "Fault Lines in the Contact Zone," I might have asked him to outline "a plan of action" for addressing the difficulties inherent in reading texts which complicate or contradict the biblical sources of authority he relies upon to interpret meaning. Or for a larger project, I might have suggested that he map out some of the daily conflicts he faces in terms of preserving his "Conservative Christian" identity from the pressures of his peers, his gymnasium teammates, and his teachers. Students like Luke engage in counter-hegemonic practices daily in classrooms where the discourses through which they read the world are delegitimized or challenged. Examining more closely how students with fundamentalist beliefs negotiate their faith in the face of alternative authorities might have led to a more critical dialogue between me and the students within this

class. Using their religious beliefs as a site for analysis might have tapped into the resistance that these students understood in their own lives.

Luke's presence taught me the danger of buying into critical pedagogical discourses that name and polarize students as the "Other" without fully understanding or appreciating the webs of reality in which they are located. In learning more about Christian fundamentalism, I discovered a variety of debates within conservative Christian movements that critical educators might profit from understanding: for example, the difference between pre-millennial and postmillennial eschatologies—the branches of theology concerned with how history will end—and the implications of these differences for how people view the importance of social and political action. While Cox discusses these different world views in terms of bridging gaps within conservative Christian camps, his discussion also raises issues for how critical educators might better understand fundamentalist students' attitudes toward critical pedagogical discourses. For example, if students believe in pre-millennial eschatology—the view that things will necessarily get progressively worse on earth until Jesus returns in the second coming—then there is little incentive for supporting pedagogics that advocate social or political change. However, if students believe in postmillennial eschatology—the view that the influence of the faithful will bring righteousness and justice to the earth in social and political spheres before Jesus returns—then they will probably be more amenable to discussing issues of institutional, not just individual, conversion. Thus, even in a class composed entirely of fundamentalist students, there might be a wide diversity of opinion about the value of a course based on critical pedagogical principles. And while I doubt whether Luke and I would ever agree on any topic, if I had understood more clearly the nature of our different world views, we might have at least come to a mutual understanding of each others' positions (the "Utopian consensus" that John Trimbur hopes to achieve), a respect for the different discourses which define who we are and how we read others.

In his final interview, Luke said about my teaching of English 300: "I think Amy's going to hear this and think 'I never knew he felt so badly about me!' I don't feel badly about her ... I just think she needs to expose herself to the other viewpoints some more" (Taped Interview 3-16-93).

Luke's comments, while painful, were an important reminder that I need to continue learning about and from my students' discourses, especially when they differ so greatly from my own. Today, as an assistant professor who teaches at another large state university, I continue to think about the lessons Luke's presence taught me, especially as I negotiate my university's secular views of knowledge with the beliefs of students from a local Seventh-Day Adventist college who take many courses at my institution. And perhaps that is the best critical teachers can do—illuminate how their discourses and those of their students are engaged in constant struggle. While I had imagined working collectively with my students in resisting oppressive discourses in society, those same discourses comprised the ways that students and I read each other in the classroom. The faith I had in the discourse of critical pedagogy did not call into question my own complicity in creating oppressive classroom relations. Like my students, I put my faith in a discourse

that, while claiming to value difference, fails to acknowledge one of the most important differences within students' lives. And, like my students, I struggled with those who didn't acknowledge the value of this faith. Perhaps faith is what is needed most for a successful critical pedagogy—faith in the value of initiating dialogue in the face of conflicts over discourses and faith in students' and teachers' ability to value and negotiate each others' differences.

*University of Nebraska—Lincoln
Lincoln, Nebraska*

Notes

¹ The name "Luke" is a pseudonym chosen by the student whose work is profiled.

² For further information about the larger goals and findings from this project, see *Critical Composition Pedagogies and the Question of Authority: Scenes from Three College-Level Classrooms*. Unpublished Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1994.

³ For this class, students wrote two individually-authored papers, a collaboratively-authored research paper (which included a 30-minute oral presentation), six one to two-page response papers to class readings, and several in-class assignments. The first paper asked students to trace the history of a belief that they held while the second required an analysis of one form of advertising and the third focused on any controversial issue related to the American Experience. Assigned readings were drawn from anthologies, local and campus newspapers, magazines, and student writing from the previous term. For formal papers, students wrote several drafts to which I and other students responded via peer sessions, full-class workshops, and individual conferences. The six response papers served as the basis for class discussions on assigned readings. I responded to these papers but did not initially grade them. At the end of the term, students selected and revised their three best responses and turned them in for a portfolio grade.

⁴ I realize that reading a student's responses or actions as shaped by one overriding discourse is problematic because such a reading seems to decontextualize this discourse from its relationship to others, like race and class. Yet, as Jennifer Gore suggests, naming the discourses that shape student response helps *teachers* examine how their own discourses shape their practices: "We all have a tendency to refuse our own implication in relationships of power-knowledge and in particular discourses; we all participate in the construction and operation of regimes of truth even while working or arguing against domination or authoritarianism, or for empowerment, democracy, and liberation" (109). Thus, this essay is more a story of how my faith in the authority of critical pedagogy conflicted with Luke's faith in fundamentalist authority and the way these collisions enabled me to question the regimes of truth within my discourses as well as his.

⁵ In providing this "summary" of the poem, I am confronted with the problem of privileging my reading over Luke's.

⁶ The binary that Luke sets up between Teresa and the narrator, who gains "the respect and the security of being a white person," can also be fruitfully examined in terms of theories of race construction and the social construction of "whiteness." Sharon Stockton's "Blacks vs. Browns" and Ann Louise Keating's "Interrogating 'Whiteness,' (De)Constructing 'Race'" both discuss interpretive frameworks which are useful in analyzing how Luke's response aims to essentialize and transcend race.

Works Cited

Bates, Stephen. *Battleground*. New York: Poseidon Press, 1993.
Bendroth, Margaret Lamberts. *Fundamentalism & Gender, 1875 to the Present*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1993.

- Berlin, James and Michael Vivion. *Cultural Studies in the English Classroom*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1992.
- Berthoff, Ann, Beth Daniell, JoAnn Campbell, C. Jan Swearingen, James Moffett. "Interchanges: Spiritual Sites of Composing." *College Composition and Communication* 45(1994): 237-63.
- Bizzell, Patricia "Beyond Anti-Foundationalism in Rhetorical Authority: Problems Defining 'Cultural Literacy.'" *College English* 52 (1990): 661-75.
- Bleich, David. "Literacy Citizenship: Resisting Social Issues." *The Right to Literacy*. Eds. Andrea Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James Slevin. New York: MLA, 1990. 163-69.
- Boone, Kathleen. *The Bible Tells Them So: The Discourse of Protestant Fundamentalism*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1989.
- Cox, Harvey. "The Warring Visions of the Religious Right." *The Atlantic Monthly*, November 1995: 59 +.
- Fox, Thomas. *The Social Uses of Writing: Politics and Pedagogy*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1990.
- Giroux, Henry. *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Gore, Jennifer. *The Struggle for Pedagogies: Critical and Feminist Discourses as Regimes of Truth*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Hernandez, Ines. "Para Teresa." *Rereading America: Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*. Eds. Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle. New York: St. Martin's P, 1989. 247-49.
- Hurlbert, Mark C. and Michael Blitz. *Composition and Resistance*. Portsmouth: Heineman, 1991.
- Kaminer, Wendy. "A Wing and a Prayer: Religion Goes Back to School." *The Nation*, 15 Dec. 1997: 18-20.
- Keating, Ann Louise. "Interrogating 'Whiteness,' (De)constructing 'Race.'" *College English* 57 (1995): 901-18.
- Kincheloe, Joe L. *Toward a Critical Politics of Teacher Thinking: Mapping the Postmodern*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1993.
- Knoblauch, C.H. and Lil Brannon. *Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook, 1993.
- Lather, Patricia. *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the Postmodern*. New York: Routledge, 1991.
- Marty, Martin and R. Scott Appleby. *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.
- McLaren, Peter. *Life in Schools: An Introduction to the Critical Pedagogy in the Foundation of Education*. New York: Longman, 1989.
- Moffett, James. *Storm in the Mountains: A Case Study of Censorship, Conflict, and Consciousness*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988.
- Ryder, Phyllis Mentzell. "I'm OK, You're (Not) OK: Teaching in a World of Relativism." *JAC: A Journal of Composition Theory* 15 (1995): 511-25.
- Shor, Ira. *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.
- Simon, Roger. *Teaching Against the Grain: Texts for a Pedagogy of Possibility*. New York: Bergin & Garvey, 1992.
- Stockton, Sharon. "'Blacks vs. Browns': Questioning the White Ground." *College English* 57 (1995):166-81.
- Swilky, Jody. "Resisting Difference: Student Response to Multicultural Texts." *The Writing Instructor* (1993): 21-33.